(c) During the Tenth Plan Period, the Department proposed to computerize and network all the Head Post Offices and major Sub Post Offices in the country, including those in Rajasthan, subject to required clearances and availability of funds.

Service condition of E.D. postal employees

†1193. SHRI HARISH RAWAT: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) the details of the steps proposed to be taken to improve the service conditions of E.D. postal employees;

(b) whether Government are contemplating the proposal of providing them the status of regular departmental employees and pensionary benefits also after their retirement; and

(c) if so, by when, a decision in this regard would be taken?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (SHRI SU. THIRUNAVUKKARASAR): (a) and (b) The Justice Talwar Committee (JTC), constituted to examine the system of Extra Departmental Agency (now called Gramin Dak Sevaks) in the Department of Posts, their conditions of employment, wage structure etc., made various recommendations in this regard, which, *inter alia,* covered issues like their status, grant of pension etc. The Government of India examined the report of the said Committee and implemented a package of benefits, in full and final settlement of recommendations of Justice Talwar Committee, *vide* order dated 17-12-1998. The benefits in brief include:

(i) Raising the basic monthly allowance by a factor of 3.25 times, for the period from 01 -01 -1996 to 28-02-1998.

(ii) Placing them in Time Related continuity Allowance (TRCA) from 01-03-1998.

(iii) Increasing the maximum amount of *Ex-gratia* Gratuity from Rs. 6000/-to Rs. 18,000/-.

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†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

(iv) Increasing the office Maintenance Allowance from Rs. 25/- to Rs. 50/- per month.

(v) Paid leave of 10 days for every half year without provision of carry forward.

(vi) Provision of Severance amount of Rs. 30,000/- in case of retirement or death, if the period of continuous employment of GDS employee is minimum 20 years. However, if a GDS had completed 15 to 20 year of continuous service, the Severance Amount will be Rs. 20,000/-. On absorption to regular departmental post, the severance amount of Rs. 20,000/- is payable after 15 years of continuous employment.

2.The recommendation regarding grant of pension was not accepted. However element of Severance Amount was introduced. Subsequently this demand was also part of the charter of demands submitted by the Postal Federations in November, 2000. The demand for change of nomenclature of Extra Departmental Agents was accepted by designating them as Gramin Dak Sevaks. As regards demand for pension, no Government-sponsored social security scheme was found feasible.

3.The recommendation for grant of status to the Gramin Dak Sevaks was not accepted even on re-examination of the issue by the Government. Provisions are already available for 75% recruitment to Group 'D' level posts and 50% of postmen's posts in the Department to be made from among the GDSs so that they have an opportunity to better their prospects and enter regular Government service.

(c) In view of above facts there is no proposal to modify the status of GDSs or grant of pension to them.

Internet bandwidth capacity

1194. SHRI C.P. THIRUNAVUKKARASU: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Bharat Sanchar Nigam Ltd. has abandoned its plan to augment its internet bandwidth capacity;

(b) if so, the reasons therefor;